



WHAT DO CANADIANS REALLY THINK ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE?

A Summary of Public Opinion Research for Communicators
2024



Re.Climate™

COMMUNICATING FOR CHANGE

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PREAMBLE

About Re.Climate

Re.Climate is Canada's go-to centre for training, research and strategy on climate change communications and public engagement. Based at Carleton University, we provide strategic services to help practitioners reach new audiences, overcome polarization, communicate urgency and motivate change.

To produce this report Re.Climate reviewed the results of 91 publicly available surveys with the objective of digging beneath topline numbers and identifying attitudes that advance or stall public support for climate action.

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Cover image: Kelowna, BC—Smoke from the McDougall Creek wildfire fills the air and nearly blocks out the sun as people take in the view of Okanagan Lake from Tugboat Beach, in Kelowna, British Columbia, Aug. 18, 2023. DARRYL DYCK/THE CANADIAN PRESS VIA AP, FILE

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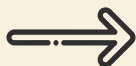
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canadians report high levels of concern about climate change and are connecting the dots between wildfires, extreme weather and global warming. But the affordability crisis has displaced climate action on the list of priorities while concerted opposition has dampened support for key policies.

The world is experiencing record temperatures and we are skirting 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels over a full year for the first time. But climate policies and actions are hindered by narratives framing them as costly, unfair and ineffective.

The competing concerns and undermining narratives are impacting public attitudes. Many Canadians say they do not believe we can meet our energy and climate objectives, even when they agree that climate change is a serious threat that requires concerted effort. There is a worrying gap between general concern about climate change and the erosion of support for specific climate actions.

Current conditions



STEADY, OVERWHELMING SUPPORT FOR THE GROWTH OF RENEWABLE POWER AND CLEAN ENERGY



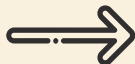
INCREASE IN BELIEF THAT OIL AND GAS ARE IMPORTANT TO CANADA'S FUTURE ECONOMY



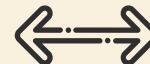
DECLINE IN PRIORITY OF CLIMATE ACTION



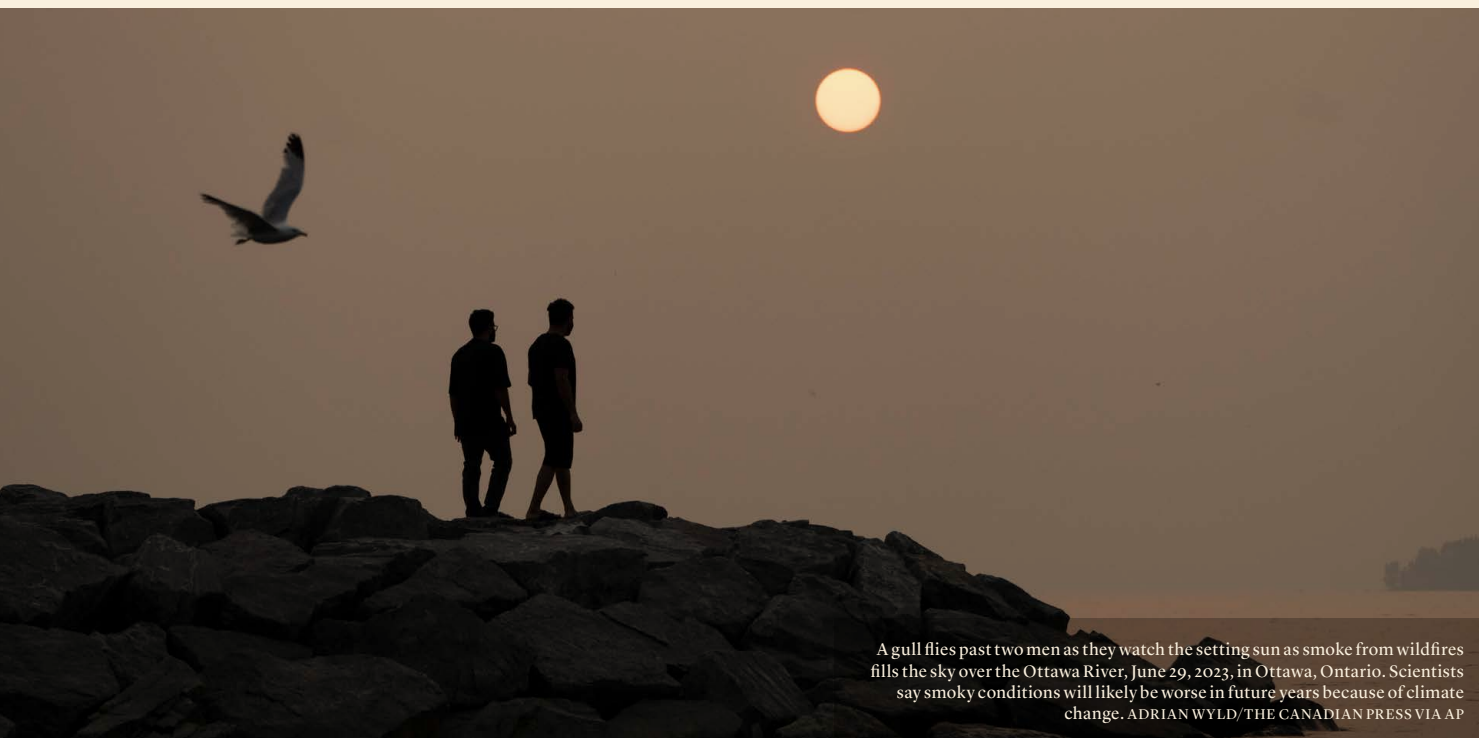
DECLINE IN SUPPORT FOR POLICIES PERCEIVED TO INCREASE COSTS



CONNECTING THE DOTS BETWEEN FIRES, EXTREME WEATHER AND CLIMATE CHANGE



GAP BETWEEN GENERAL SUPPORT FOR ACTION AND SUPPORT FOR SPECIFIC ACTIONS



A gull flies past two men as they watch the setting sun as smoke from wildfires fills the sky over the Ottawa River, June 29, 2023, in Ottawa, Ontario. Scientists say smoky conditions will likely be worse in future years because of climate change. ADRIAN WYLD/THE CANADIAN PRESS VIA AP

Tailwinds

Concern

Most Canadians are worried about climate change and they want governments and corporations to do more to address the problem.

Connection to fires and extreme weather

Canadians increasingly understand that bizarre weather, heatwaves and wildfires are caused by climate change.

Vision of the future

Canadians see clean energy being very important to Canada's future economy and want Canada to keep up with the U.S. and other jurisdictions.

Headwinds

Priority

Anxiety about the cost-of-living and household finances have knocked climate change down the list of priorities. Many people still see climate change as a distant problem and underestimate the level of concern that does exist across the population, leaving most of us feeling more alone than we really are.

Efficacy

Solutions uncertainty: Many Canadians are not clear that burning fossil fuels is the main cause of the problem. They are also unconvinced that alternatives are available and effective. Supporters of the federal Conservative party are dramatically less convinced that climate change is a serious problem and much less supportive of climate policies.

Action gap

Canadians' concern about climate change is much higher than support for specific climate actions and several key policies have recently lost support. Canadians continue to support fossil fuels both for domestic use and export while a majority of Canadians believe the country is already doing its fair share compared to our international peers.



MIND THE GAPS

COMMENTARY BY LOUISE COMEAU

There's only so much attention to go around. Like a budget, we apportion our attention to top of mind concerns. Mortgage renewals, fears about access to affordable housing, the rising cost of food and energy; these issues grab peoples' attention—right now. Who has time to worry about climate change when issues like these grab our attention? Our finite attention budget (Sisco et al., 2023), combined with gaps in our understanding of climate change, make this issue vulnerable to wavering public support for action.

Most people see climate change as a distant threat in time (not a risk to me or my family because it will happen to other generations in the future), and geography, (not a risk to me or my family or nature that I care about because it will happen to other people and nature far away).

Combine this distance gap (O'Neill, 2020), with a perception gap, and we begin to understand why climate change is an issue that grabs our attention and then falls off our radar. The perception gap (Andre et al., 2024) refers to the fact that people generally believe they are more supportive of climate action than the rest of the population. This psychological barrier is like a self-fulfilling prophecy. We think there are weak social expectations (e.g., social norms) for climate action, so there are. If we believe other people that matter to us expect us to do something about climate change, we are more likely to take action ourselves.

This is why talking to friends and family about our concerns about climate change is so important. The act of sharing our thoughts, feelings, concerns and excitement about opportunities helps close the perception gap.

Distance and perception gaps, combined with weak understanding of the personal and social benefits of solutions like heat pumps, electric vehicles or carbon pricing leave people vulnerable to solutions misinformation and disinformation. The rise of solutions denialism (The Centre for Countering Digital Hate, 2023) is further weakening people's sense of agency to overcome barriers) and efficacy (confidence that solutions are effective).

Understanding the role of risk perceptions, agency, efficacy and social norms can help us understand the vulnerable place climate change holds in our attention budget. We see the effects in this year's public opinion roll up where general support is high (e.g., support for doing more on climate change), but support for specific policies is falling (Impact Canada, n.d.). The next chapter provides recommendations to counter these trends.



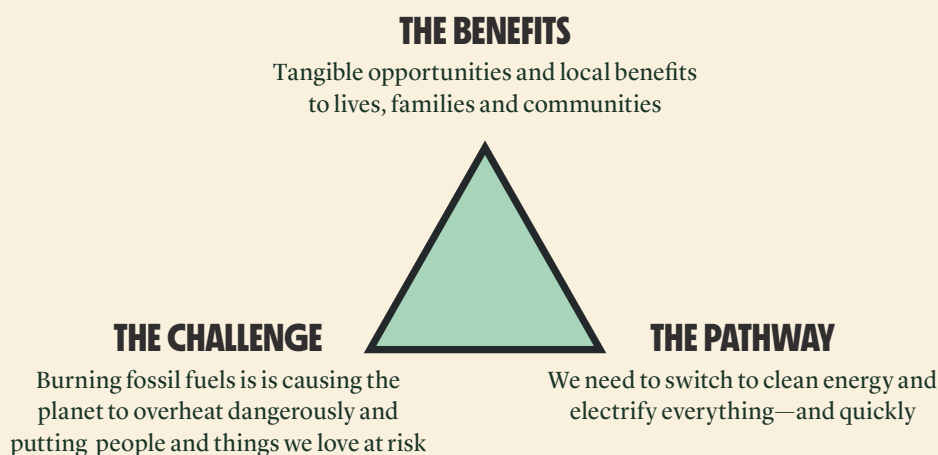
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNICATORS

Use plain language and speak to values, not just facts. Remember to stress the high-level motivators: later is too late for protecting what we love.

Don't try to win over climate skeptics—engage the majority who are worried but aren't sure what needs to be done.

Amplify trusted messengers, especially scientists and doctors. Family and friends remain key sources of validation and information.

Consider using a message triangle to make sure you remember to communicate three necessary points to deliver a complete narrative.



Make it a priority

Later is too late: our children and the places we love are at risk because of carbon pollution from burning fossil fuels like oil, natural gas and coal. We have to act now to crack down on carbon pollution.

Show the benefits and effectiveness of the path forward

We can stop climate pollution by switching to clean energy that's safe and abundant. Provide relevant actions and choices that address today's problems and climate change and make clear why and how they are effective.

Create a sense of momentum

Normalize climate action by helping people recognize that others share their concern (e.g.: "It's not just you and me: 70 per cent of Canadians get that climate change is a major crisis.")

And give examples of progress—tangible examples relevant to your audience and general examples, like "Canada's electricity grid has already cut carbon pollution in half." We can power our homes, vehicles and economy without carbon pollution.

Normalize that the world is clearly shifting to clean energy and away from fossil fuels. Governments, businesses, communities and individuals need to act now to prepare for this change, not "wait and see".



A heat pump installed on a single family home.
DANIEL REINHARDT/PICTURE-ALLIANCE/DPA/AP IMAGES

Communicating energy affordability

1. COMPARE AND CONTRAST CLEAN ENERGY WITH FOSSIL FUELS.

- Renewable power is abundant and getting cheaper all the time while fossil fuels drive climate change making us more vulnerable to volatile price spikes.

2. FRAME ENERGY AFFORDABILITY IN CONCRETE TERMS THAT REFLECT LIVED EXPERIENCE.

- Gain frame: Lean into the public's growing understanding that people spend less to use heat pumps, renewable energy and electric vehicles over the lifetime of ownership.
- Loss frame: Right now, most households are wasting money and paying utilities for more energy than necessary.

3. SITUATE ELECTRIFICATION AND ELECTRICITY INVESTMENTS AS AN INVESTMENT WITH LONG-TERM BENEFITS.

- Investing in clean energy saves money over time because you don't have to keep buying fuel. Electrification is anti-inflationary.

For more on communicating energy affordability, see the briefing [Messaging Energy Affordability](#) (Comeau and Melanson, 2023).



THE ACTION GAP



A skater on melting ice during record warm winter 2023-2024. Gage Park, downtown Brampton, Ont. February 9, 2024. MIKE CAMPBELL / NURPHOTO VIA AP

Canadians report high levels of concern about climate change and, when asked, they say they want governments and corporations to take action. But the level of support is much lower when it comes to specific climate policies and measures.

At a high level, there is a significant gap between principle and practice. In principle, Canadians say climate change is a crisis that requires immediate action. But the public is conflicted over whether the country is doing enough. Over half say the government is not working hard enough and a similar proportion say Canada is doing its fair share.

High level gap

Climate change is a "crisis" that necessitates immediate action



Government is not working hard enough to tackle climate change



Our country is doing its fair share to combat climate change



Electrification gap

The gap between general support and support for specifics is obvious on several fronts. On electrification, Canadians overwhelmingly agree the country will need more electricity. And Canadians broadly agree it should be clean electricity. But at the same time, a large majority support building new natural gas plants and don't believe a clean grid can be achieved over the coming decade.

Positive attitudes towards clean electricity regulations have dropped 18 points since the summer of 2023. While Canadians want action on this front, concern about costs means they would delay cleaning up the grid beyond 2035 (Innovative Research Group, 2024).

Electric gap

Canada needs more electricity generation to meet future demand



Support regulations for clean electricity by 2035



Support building new natural gas generation capacity



Not realistic for Canada's electricity to be converted to non-carbon emitting sources over next 12 years



Electric vehicle gap

Electric vehicles have become a symbol of the energy transition. Increasingly visible on the streets, they are also subject to a drumbeat of misinformation.

Canadians think we need policy requiring zero-emissions transportation, and support penalties for automakers that do not supply zero-emission vehicles. At the same time, most do not think it's realistic to phase out gas-powered vehicles by 2035.

EV gap

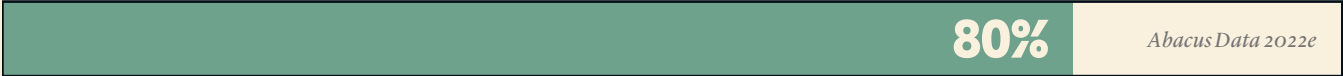
To meet the 2035 target of 100% of new vehicles sold being zero-emissions, we need policy that will result in vehicle manufacturers providing zero-emission vehicles at more affordable prices



Support imposing penalties on automakers so they meet 2035 ZEV mandate



Support/strongly support/accept rebates when buying EVs



Prohibiting sale of new gas-powered vehicles by 2035 “not realistic”



Net-zero gap

Canadians are broadly supportive of heading for net-zero by 2050. But the concept is not well-understood, not considered to be realistic and a majority of the public believe we can continue burning fossil fuels and aim for net-zero.

For example, most people support net-zero and simultaneously think we can't replace burning gas in buildings with clean alternatives.

Net-zero nonsense

Support net-zero by 2050



Have heard of the concept of net-zero emissions by 2050 in Canada, but don't really know what it looks like



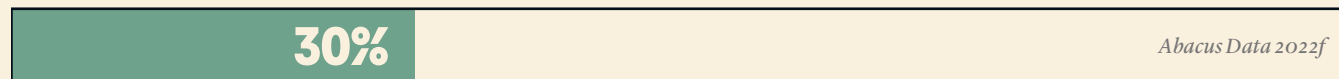
Banning natural gas heating "not realistic"



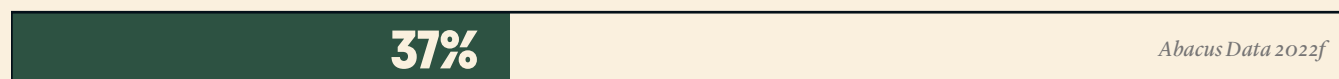
Requiring all natural gas appliances to be electric within 15 years "not realistic"



Net-zero by 2050 "realistic"



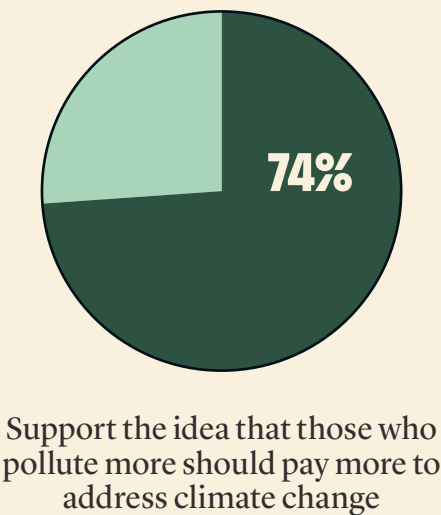
Deadline for net-zero is moving too fast



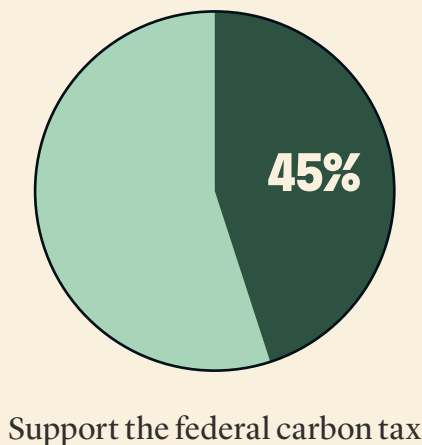
Clobbering the carbon tax

Pollution pricing is particularly vulnerable during an affordability crisis and there has been a sustained attack on the carbon tax. Three-quarters of Canadians support the principle of polluter pay but support for the carbon tax has dropped below 50 per cent, as opposed to majority support two years ago.

Polluter pay gap

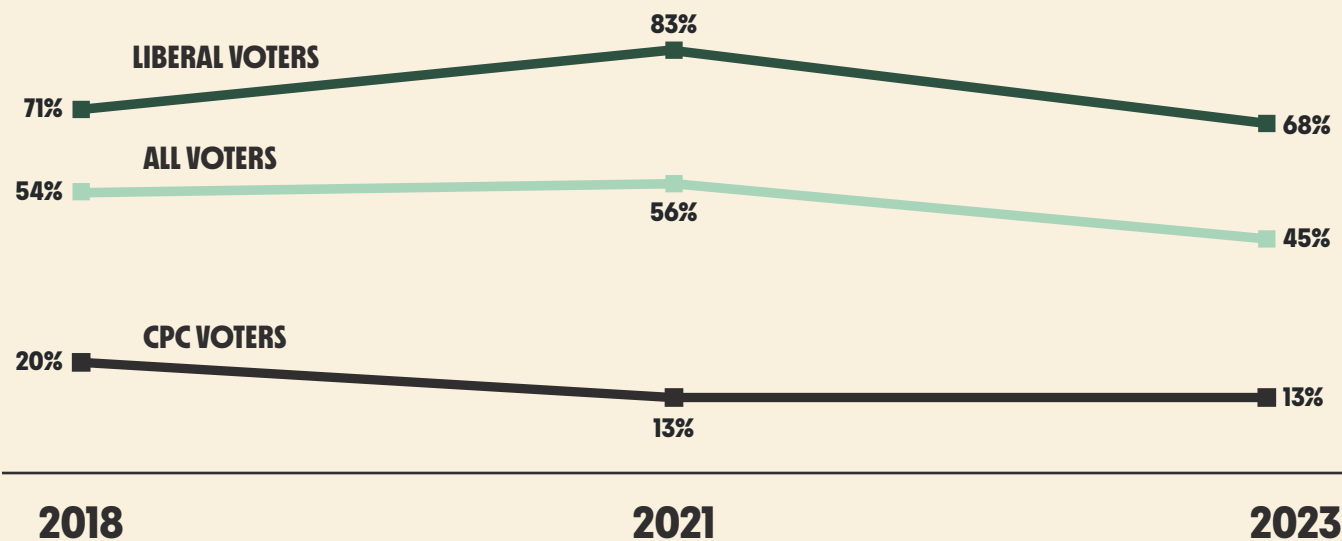


Leger 2023c



Angus Reid Institute 2023e

Carbon tax support over time



Angus Reid Institute 2023e

Canadians have come to believe the carbon tax is ineffective and unfair. Somewhere between a majority and two-thirds of the public now say it is ineffective at combatting climate change or feel they aren't having any real impact paying the consumer carbon levy.

Carbon tax trouble

Feel like they aren't having any real impact by paying carbon taxes



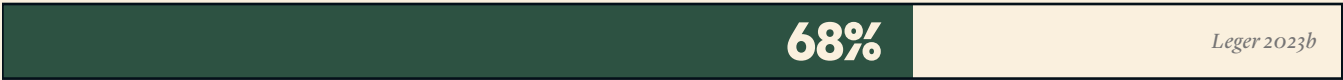
Federal carbon pricing program is ineffective at combatting climate change



Opposed to carbon tax price increase (21% say “poor timing”; 46% say “very poor” timing)



Unwilling to pay more in taxes for gasoline (up to \$0.40/L by 2030) to aid in Canada’s climate net-zero policies



Support an expansion to see all forms of home heating fuel exempted





AFFORDABILITY



For Sale sign seen outside a house in the center of Edmonton. On Friday, January 7, 2022, in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. PHOTO BY ARTUR WIDAK/NURPHOTO VIA AP

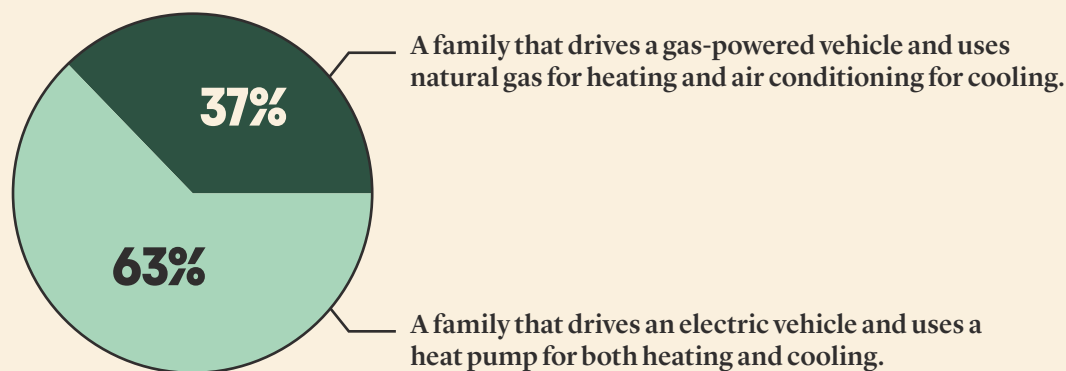
Climate action has dropped in priority in relation to concerns about the cost of living and the affordability of housing. Canadians do generally believe that heat pumps and electric vehicles ultimately end up saving money but have become less supportive of government policies like clean electricity regulations or carbon taxes when they hear warnings about increased costs.

The carbon tax is the most publicized example of a policy losing support. But attitudes about clean electricity regulations are also worsening. In one tracking survey, positive sentiment decreased from 51 per cent down to 33 per cent over the last half of 2023—an 18 point drop since June 2023 (Innovative Research Group, 2024).

The good news for communicators is that the public understands that clean energy options will cost less, once they are in place. For example, 63 per cent of Canadians think a family will spend less on energy overall if it uses a heat pump for heating and cooling and drives an EV, despite the upfront costs (Abacus Data, 2023e).

Household costs

“Which families do you think would spend less on energy overall?”



Clean Energy Canada 2023

But be aware that Canadians perceive the affordability benefits to be fairly small at the macro level, compared to a mix with both clean and fossil fuel energy sources (Lachapelle & EcoAnalytics, 2022).

Energy costs for Canadians will decline about 12 per cent on average by 2050 if the country pursues an energy transition to net-zero, according to researchers at the Canadian Climate Institute. This is not a compellingly large figure over such a long period, although rebates and other programs can make the transition even more affordable (Smith & Harland, 2023).

Communicators should highlight the potential for immediate savings and also recognize that our psychology makes us more sensitive to loss than gain. So, don’t shy away from talking about wasting money on wasted energy and focus on near-term finances. For example: a family could cut \$800 off monthly energy bills by switching to an EV and heat pump, compared to one that is largely reliant on fossil fuels (Abacus Data, 2023e).

And remember that a complete narrative includes that the cost of not acting against climate pollution is very high and those we love will pay the price, not only financially.

A more stable future

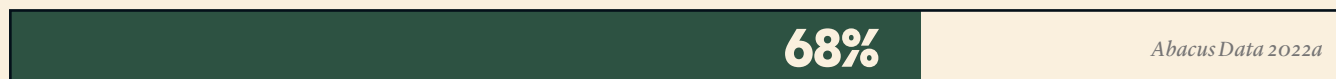
A plurality of Canadians (42 per cent) believe renewable energy prices are more stable and predictable than are prices for oil and gas (Lachapelle & EcoAnalytics, 2022).

And Canadians generally agree on the direction of travel. The public is almost four times more likely to say that the energy transition is a good thing (41 per cent) than a bad thing (11 per cent) (Innovative Research Group, 2023).

Meanwhile, the public is coming to understand that climate change is likely to impact them financially. Insurance is becoming more expensive and insurance companies like Desjardins have stopped new mortgages in flood zones. Taxpayers are being called on to backstop insurance in several U.S. states already. A large majority (71 per cent) worry that climate change will increase expenses and squeeze retirement funds (Randall, 2023; Pollara Strategic Insights, 2023).

Clean energy affordability

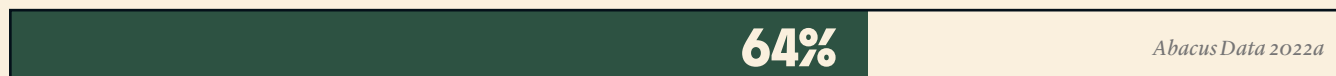
A clean energy system (including hydro, wind, solar power and electric vehicles) would be more secure



Support more retrofit programs to make homes more energy efficient



A clean energy system (including hydro, wind, solar power and electric vehicles) would be more affordable



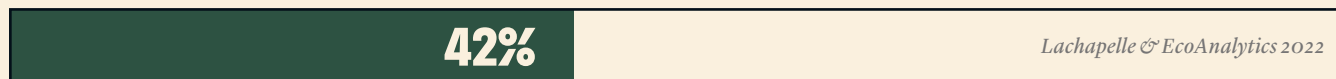
Support investments to improve public transport



EVs will end up much/a bit cheaper despite higher upfront cost



Renewable energy prices are more stable and predictable than are prices for oil and gas



Political narratives matter

Political narratives against the energy transition are particularly effective in the context of anxiety about affordability. Populist conservatives are highly engaged on energy issues and are having an impact across the public, even among those not feeling the pinch. We see similar changes in attitudes among people who are not struggling to pay bills as among people who are facing financial trouble.

Both groups show the same trends. For example, support for investments in electrification has declined by 7 to 10 points in the past half year, if those investments are perceived to impact electricity bills. That is true for people who say they are finding it hard to get by, no matter how hard they work, as well as for those who are managing well (Innovative Research Group, 2024).



ATTITUDES ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE



Evacuated residents of Merritt, British Columbia, line up at a reception centre in Kelowna, British Columbia, Thursday, Nov. 18, 2021. JEFF MCINTOSH/THE CANADIAN PRESS VIA AP

Canadians continued to prioritize climate change through the COVID-19 pandemic but inflation and cost-of-living concerns have pushed the issue down the list of priorities. The background concern about climate change has not diminished and Canadians think extreme weather and fires will keep getting worse but the number of Canadians who list climate change as a top priority has fallen.

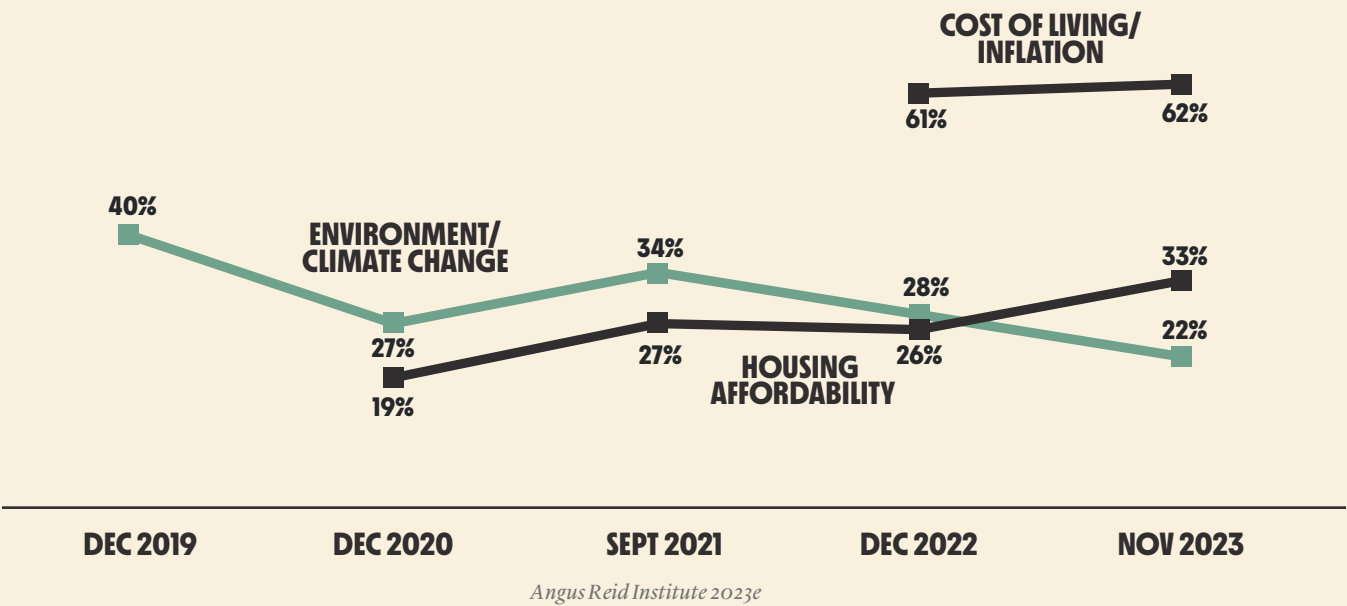
Climate as priority

The drop in level of priority means a drop in the degree to which governments are held accountable for acting on climate change. The decline also allows those who are otherwise climate-concerned to support political parties without a commitment to cut climate pollution.

Inflation began rising in 2021 and the Bank of Canada started raising interest rates in 2022. The proportion of Canadians listing climate change as a top issue dropped by 12 points since 2021 (Angus Reid, 2023e).

Climate priority

“Thinking of the various issues and challenges facing Canada, which ones do you personally care about the most?”



The proportion of those saying climate change is among their top issues facing Canada has dropped from 40 per cent in 2019, to 34 per cent in 2021, to 22 per cent in Nov. 2023 (Angus Reid, 2023e).

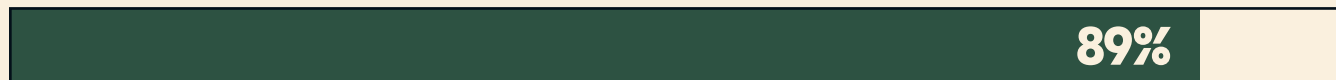
Extreme weather

The drop in priority does not mean that Canadians are failing to make the connection between climate change and wildfires or other extreme events. Most Canadians have come to understand that extreme weather events will happen more and more often.

But communicators should recognize that climate change remains a psychologically distant problem as opposed to a near-term threat. And most segments of the population identify climate change in general as a slightly greater threat than the specific impacts of extreme weather (Lachapelle & EcoAnalytics, 2024).

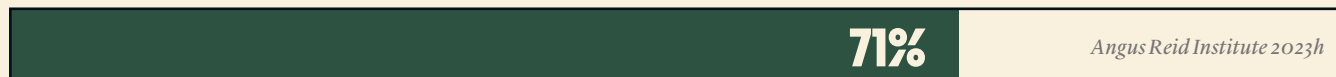
Fires & extreme weather

Have noticed an increase in natural disasters over the past decade



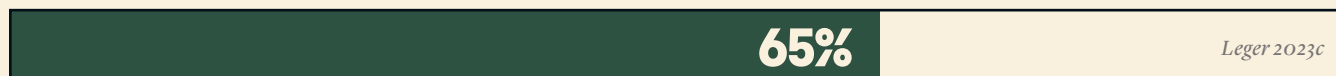
Angus Reid Institute 2023h

Believe increase in natural disasters is the direct result of climate change



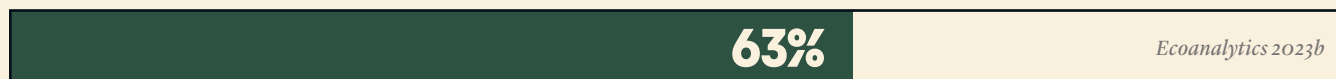
Angus Reid Institute 2023h

Believe extreme weather events will occur more often



Leger 2023c

Reported experience with negative impacts from changing weather patterns



Ecoanalytics 2023b

Almost all Canadians (89 per cent) have noticed an increase in natural disasters over the past decade and 7 in 10 believe it is because “we are feeling the effects of climate change” (Abacus, 2023h).

The public understands this trend will continue—two-thirds of the public think we are going to see extreme weather events more often (Leger, 2023c).





COMMUNICATING CLIMATE CHANGE IN QUEBEC

Communicating Climate Change in Quebec was prepared by COPTICOM based on the annual Baromètre de l'action climatique and recent proprietary surveys.¹ This chapter summarizes the recommendations and tips provided to the Climate Communications Community of Practice in Quebec.

What the research shows

1. **The consensus on the need to act is holding and still growing in Quebec:** 85 per cent of the Quebec population believe in the urgency of acting on climate, an upward trend. In fact, concern about the climate crisis has never been stronger than it is now. However, the most effective behaviors for reducing the population's carbon footprint are still being adopted slowly, even though many Quebecers report incorporating climate-friendly actions into their daily lives.
2. **The threat is not (yet) personal:** Even though Quebecers believe in the urgency of action, they do not perceive a high, short-term climate threat to themselves personally. The threat is seen as distant, affecting Quebec and Canada more broadly, and especially the rest of the world.
3. **Quebeckers expect more from their leaders, companies, and themselves:** 71 per cent of the population feel we have to accelerate the pace of climate action and 85 per cent wish that governments, companies and individuals would undertake “profound changes.”
4. **Unsustainable consumption:** A large majority of Quebecers (68 per cent) believe we have to profoundly change how we look at consumption and at how our economy operates. A sizable minority (28 per cent) do not agree, especially men and people in the 34-54 age group.
5. **High level of solidarity with vulnerable groups:** An overwhelming majority of people consider it important to take measures to protect individuals who are most likely to suffer the effects of climate change. Quebecers are also in favor of initiatives aimed at protecting public health (e.g., greening of cities, free shuttle system for easy access to natural environments, etc.).
6. **In parallel, a growing feeling of powerlessness, blame shifting and denial in a segment of the population:** Along with a growing sense of urgency, there is a parallel increase in beliefs that may harm climate action, such as a sense of powerlessness (it is too late to act), a rejection of responsibility (blaming others), or the denial of the human role in climate disruption. **Eco-anxiety is becoming a public health issue** and climate change is having an impact on the population's psychological health. Nearly half of all people report experiencing eco-anxiety in the past years. The most frequently reported effect is worry about the future. In Quebec, eco-anxiety can stimulate the adoption of individual actions to reduce carbon footprints, but it can also paralyze or demobilize when it becomes too severe. For example, those who report high levels of eco-anxiety are less likely to buy locally, minimize the use of gasoline vehicles, or compost.

1. Champagne St-Arnaud, V., Boivin, M. et Langlais, K. (2023). Baromètre de l'action climatique 2023. <https://unpointcinq.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Barometre-Action-Climatique-2023.pdf> New 2024 trends and observations from recent surveys by COPTICOM have been included.

Suggested high-level communications messages for 2024

1. ***This is all connected***—Link the many short-term concerns people have with the need to act urgently on climate change and to fundamentally change many aspects of our lives:

Increase the level of awareness of the interconnectedness of multiple concerns and crises among more engaged segments of the population.
2. ***This already affects me and my family and will get worse***—Reduce psychological distance in regards to the collective and personal impacts of climate change:

Diminish the gap between Quebecers' belief in climate change (and the urgency of action) and their lack of understanding of the threats climate change poses directly to them.
3. ***We all should be doing more: governments, companies and individuals who are not financially hard-pressed***—Accentuate most Quebecers sense that much more should be done to fight climate change:

Tap into this understanding that much more should be done with the belief that all are capable of doing more.
4. ***We need to talk about our problems with over-consumption and production which are destructive to our environment***—Introduce new narratives that break with the economic status quo:

A strong majority of Quebecers indicate that they see links between overconsumption and production with climate change and environmental degradation. This could be a way to start mainstreaming a conversation around sufficiency and even degrowth for destructive sectors.
5. ***Taking action now can also bring short-term benefits, for me and the collective***—Create an individual and collective desire in transitioning towards a healthier climate both on the mitigation and adaptation front:

Increase personal and collective climate action: reinforcing the many positive social, health, environmental and economic benefits of living in a healthier climate. For example, highlighting concrete examples of thriving sustainable communities and climate adaptation initiatives as a road map to a better, happier and healthier future.
6. ***We can improve things by working together***—Show people that acting on climate change and other related concerns and crises leads to concrete gains, increases solidarity and improves quality of life, even in the face of environmental perils:

Among leaders and mobilized segments of the public, reinforce the confidence that acting together works and achieves concrete changes, initiatives and policies.
7. ***We are all in this together***—Reinforce Quebecers' sense of solidarity towards the most vulnerable individuals and communities:

Heighten Quebecers' awareness of climate justice: appeal to their solidarity with vulnerable individuals. Increase their understanding of climate-related inequalities disproportionately affecting women, children, seniors, Indigenous and racialized individuals and communities.



THE CLIMATE DIVIDES



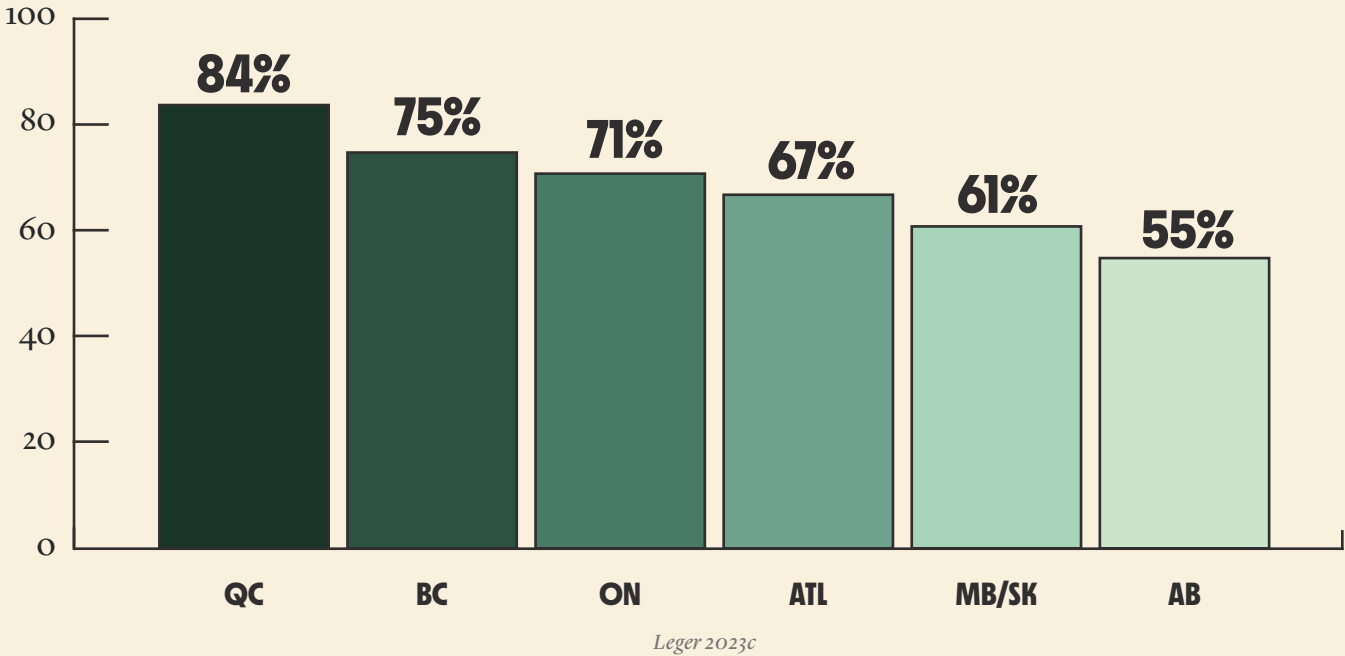
Structures that were destroyed by wildfire are seen in Lytton, British Columbia, on Tuesday, June 14, 2022. DARRYL DYCK/ THE CANADIAN PRESS VIA AP

There are significant differences between audiences across regions and demographics in Canada. And Conservative voters are much less concerned about climate change and are less supportive of transitioning off fossil fuels.

Divided by regions, demographics

Although 72 per cent of Canadians say they are “worried” (45 per cent) or “very worried” (27 per cent) about climate change, those topline findings mask large differences across regions from a high of 84 per cent in Quebec to just 55 per cent in Alberta.

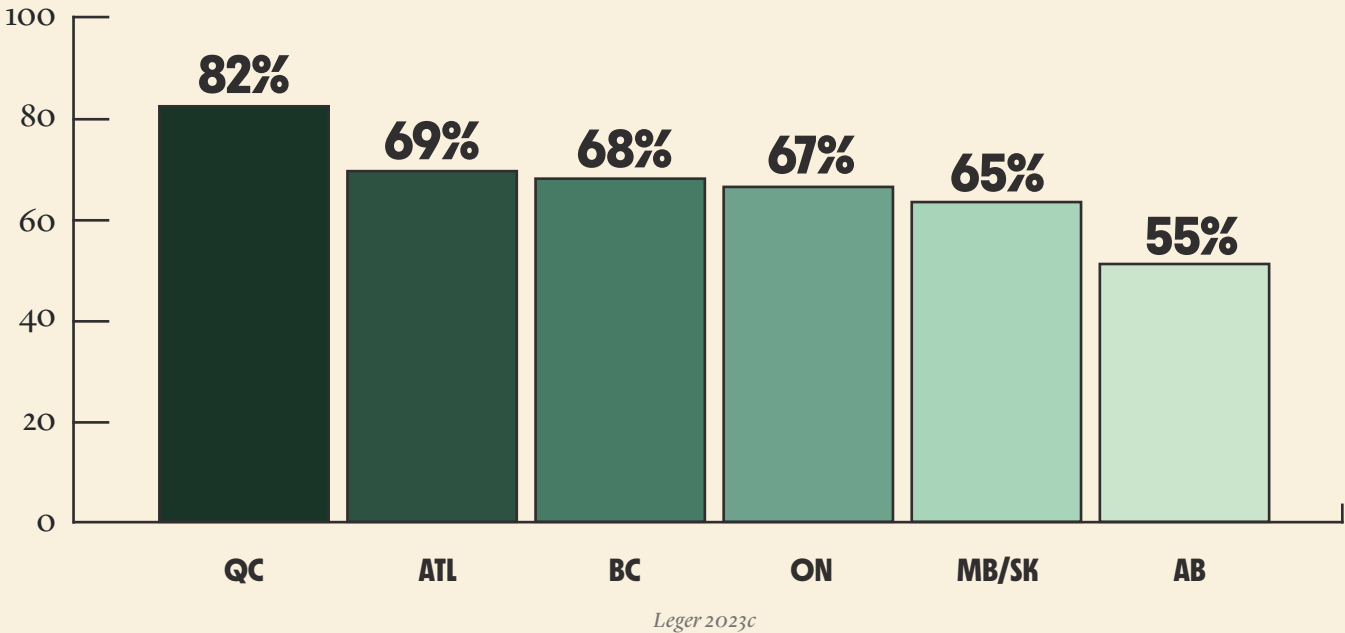
Climate concern by region



There’s a similar divide on the question of what’s causing climate change: 82 per cent of Quebecers blame human activities, while just 51 per cent of Albertans say climate change is “mostly caused by human activities” (Leger, 2023c).

Who’s to blame? Depends where you live.

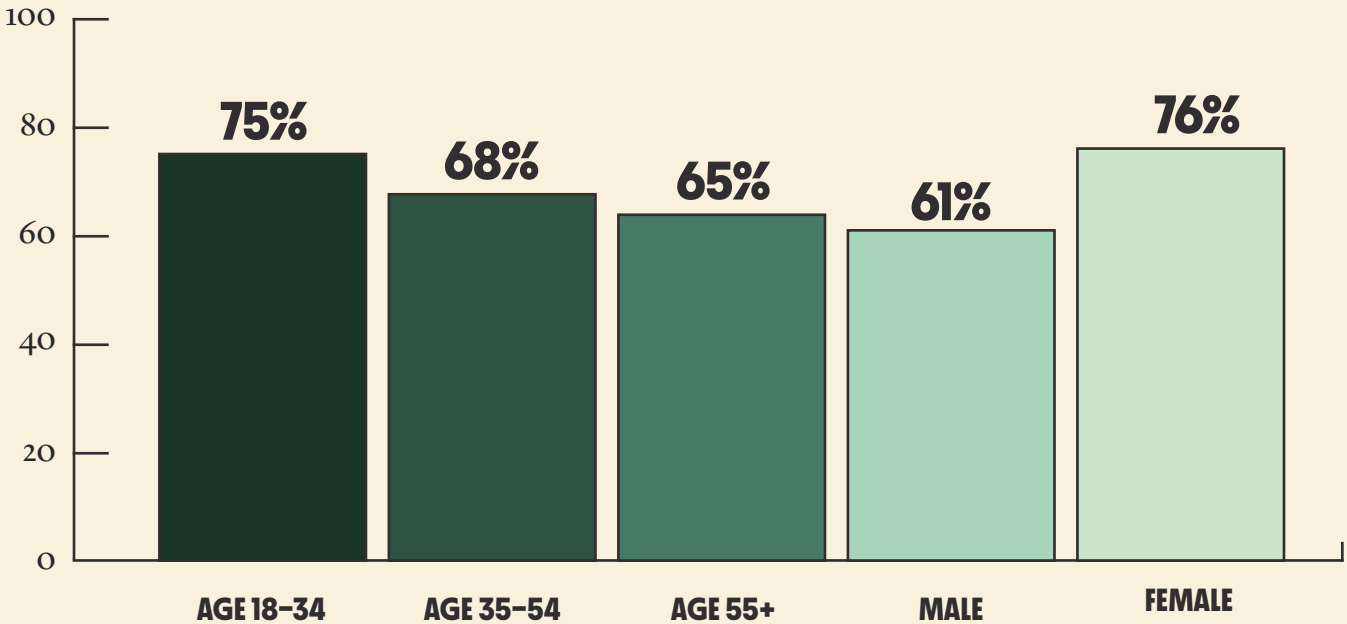
“Climate change is mostly caused by human activities.”



The demographic divides are less extreme than regional divides. But there are notable differences by age and gender. Women and younger Canadians are more concerned about climate change. And those demographics are also more likely to understand that climate change is caused by human activities.

Who’s to blame? Depends who you are.

“Climate change is mostly caused by human activities”



Leger 2023c

Political divide

Political leanings are one of the biggest divides among Canadians. Conservative voters report much lower concern about climate change and less support for climate policies. Canadians who voted Conservative in the last federal election express very different beliefs about climate impacts than those who voted for other parties, such as whether wildfires are linked to climate change.

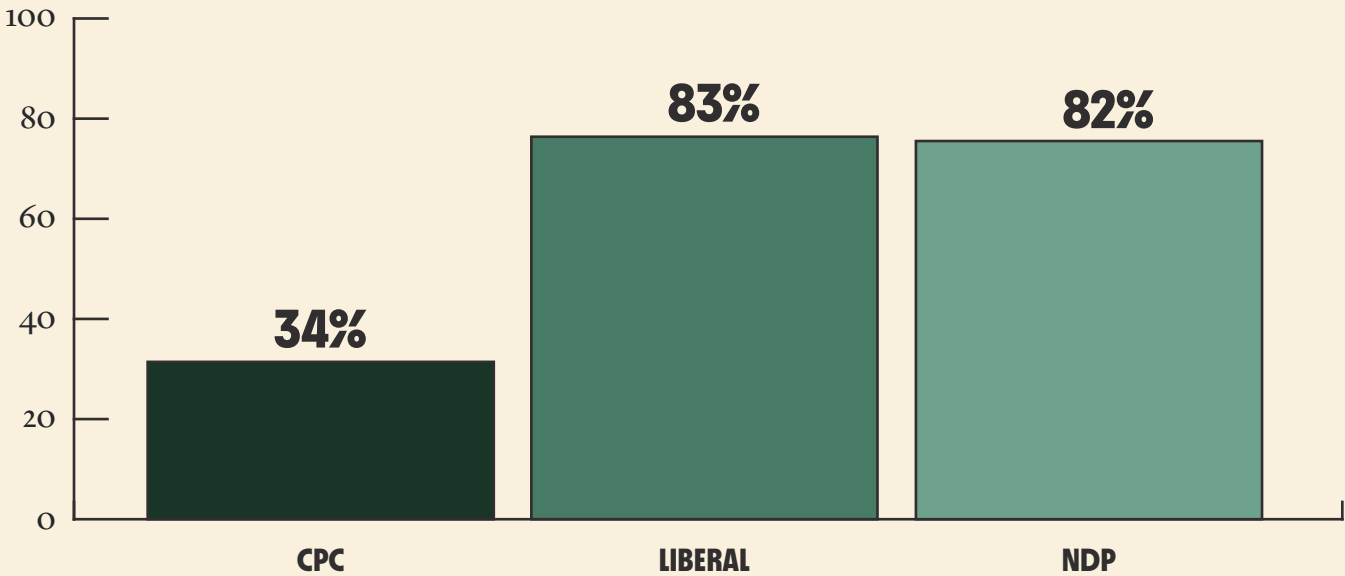
For example, just 7 per cent of past Conservative voters named climate change as one of their top 3 concerns in 2023, compared to about 40 per cent of people who voted for one of the other parties (Angus Reid, 2023g)

On the question of urgency, 83 per cent of past Liberal voters agree “climate change is a crisis and we need to act quickly.” Only one-third of Conservative voters feel the same way.

When it comes to the cause of climate change impacts, like wildfires, Canadians are even more polarized. Where 80 per cent of Liberal voters believe the 2023 wildfires were “directly linked to climate change,” barely one-quarter of Conservative voters agree the two are linked (Angus Reid, 2023i).

Political divide: climate crisis

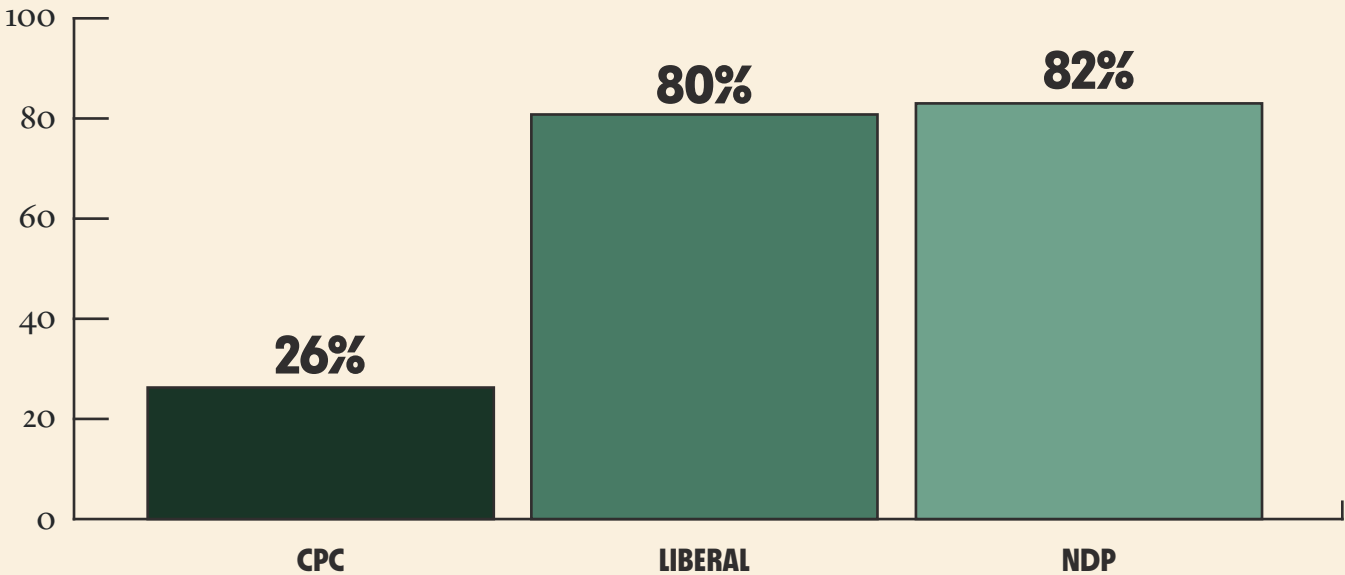
“Climate change is a crisis and we need to act quickly.”



Angus Reid Institute 2023i

Political divide: wildfires

“These wildfires are directly linked to climate change.”



Angus Reid Institute 2023i

OPINIONS ABOUT ENERGY

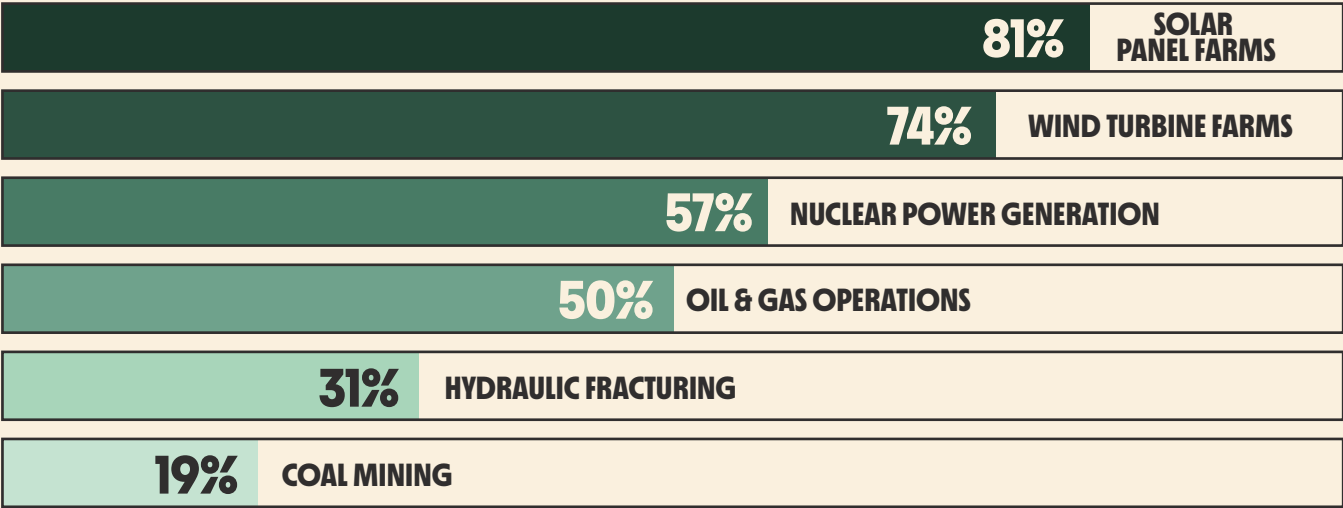


September 17, 2023: Premier of Alberta, Danielle Smith speaks during the 24th World Petroleum Congress Opening Ceremony at the Telus Convention Center in Calgary, Alberta on September 17, 2023. Over 5,000 delegates from 100+ countries gathered in Calgary for the 24th World Petroleum Congress.
PHOTO BY ARTUR WIDAK/NURPHOTO VIA AP

Canadians are very supportive of expanding renewables like solar and wind power—and there are strong levels of support across political and demographic divides.

Expanding clean energy is significantly more popular than fossil fuels but a large majority believes that oil and gas will continue to be important into the future.

Canadians’ support for expanding different types of energy



Angus Reid Institute 2023b

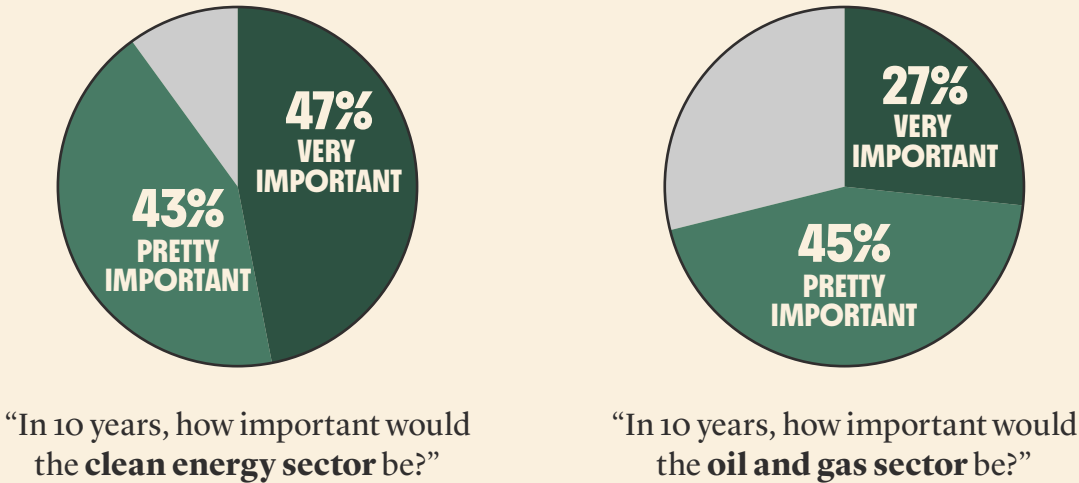
Vision of the future

Canadians think oil and gas will be important to Canada’s future economy but they believe the clean energy sector is becoming even more important.

Ninety per cent of the public think the clean energy sector will be “very important” or “pretty important” to the Canadian economy in 10 years. By contrast, 71 per cent say the same about the oil and gas sector.

The standard political divide applies around questions on the importance of oil and gas in the future, but voters are fairly united in their perception of the importance of the clean energy sector. Among past Conservative voters, 84 per cent say the sector will be very important (39 per cent) or pretty important (45 per cent) to Canada’s future economy (Abacus, 2023e).

Vision of the future



Abacus Data 2023e

Battery manufacturing announcements are a litmus test for perceptions of the energy transition and the public opinion results show they are seen as proof the transition can be economically beneficial. Two-thirds of Canadians say the new battery plants and EV factories are evidence the transition to clean energy can benefit Canada’s economy.

Twice as many Canadians see the announcements as being positive for the economy and job creation than view them skeptically: 68 per cent to 32 per cent (Abacus Data, 2023h).

Keeping pace in clean energy

There is a growing recognition that the energy transition is happening globally and Canadians definitely want to keep up with other countries.

For example, an overwhelming majority (83 per cent) believe the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act has made it important for Canada to boost investments in clean industry and develop its own industrial policy to spur the sector.

Support is extraordinarily high for keeping up with the U.S. on clean energy investments, especially among past NDP and Liberal voters (97 per cent and 93 per cent) but two-thirds of Conservative voters also agree, as do three-quarters of Albertans (Abacus Data, 2023d).

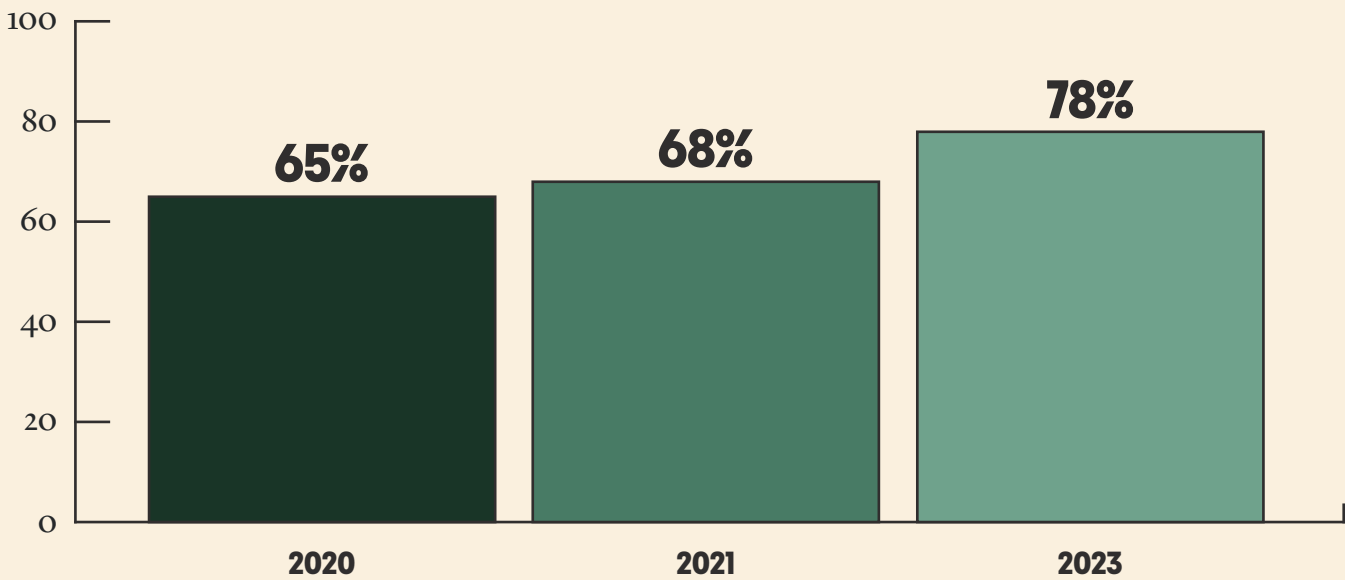
A large majority of Canadians agree the country needs to act now and be ready so the country will be prepared for a drop in global fossil fuel demand, rather than being passive (“wait and see”). This “readiness” frame is supported by 72 per cent of the Canadian public, including 62 per cent of Albertans (EcoAnalytics/Environics, 2022).

Importance of oil and gas

Although renewables and the clean energy sector are popular, the public has come to see fossil fuels as increasingly important to the economy over the past few years. And two-thirds of Canadians agree that Canadian exports can contribute to combatting global climate change.

Almost 80 per cent now say oil and gas are important to the Canadian economy, up from 65 per cent in 2020 (Nanos Research, 2023f).

Oil and gas important for economy



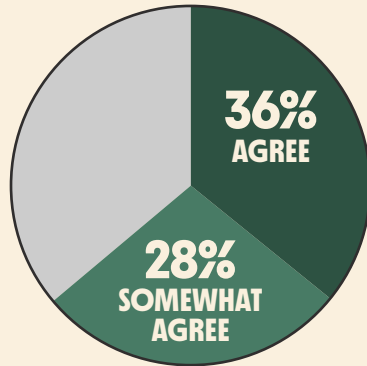
NanosResearch 2023f

On the question of reducing greenhouse gas emissions around the world, industry frequently argues that Canadian exports can wean other countries off coal. That argument appears to be compelling.

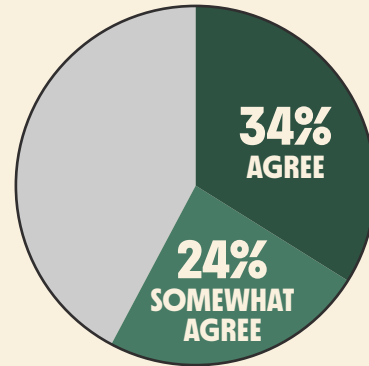
Two-thirds of the public agree (entirely or somewhat) that Canadian exports of oil and gas can help combat climate change.

And 58 per cent think Canada should expand oil and gas exports to help the world have more secure energy supplies (Nanos Research, 2023f).

Exporting energy



“Canada’s oil and gas sector can contribute to combating global climate change.”



“Canada should expand oil and gas exports to help the world have more secure energy supplies.”

NanosResearch 2023f

Support for “natural” gas

Natural gas has an enviable marketing advantage with the word “natural” in the name. It is much more popular than other fossil fuels, like coal or oil.

For example, even though most Canadians say they want to green the grid, natural gas has significant support in electricity generation.

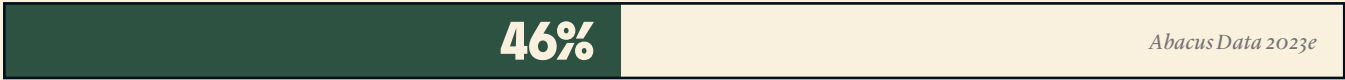
Survey results all show a strong majority are supportive or willing to accept natural gas plants for electricity, with very small percentages opposed. About three-quarters of Canadians are on board with natural gas for electricity in general and 67 per cent support building new natural gas generating capacity (Ipsos, 2023d).

The marketing power of the word “natural” appears to be playing a major role in attitudes. Although they are the same product, “natural gas” is much more popular than “hydraulic fracturing” (fracking) or “fossil gas.”

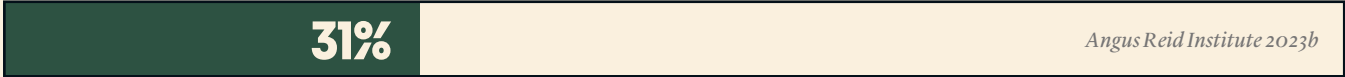
In one survey, the same respondents were almost twice as supportive of “natural gas” compared to “fossil gas” (Abacus Data, 2023e).

Name that gas

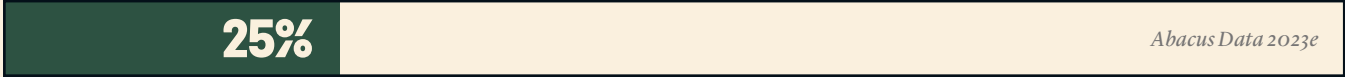
Support power generation using “natural gas”



Support expanding “hydraulic fracturing”



Support power generation using “fossil gas”



A note about nuclear

Nuclear power has gained some support and its supporters are now a majority. Survey results show 55 to 57 per cent of Canadians agree with the use of nuclear energy. Although not a huge majority, it’s almost twice the percentage that voice opposition to nuclear power. Support is highest in the two provinces that currently operate nuclear plants (three in Ontario and one in New Brunswick).

Two-thirds of Ontarians (66 per cent) support nuclear power in general while 74 per cent say they support refurbishing aging plants and 62 per cent say they would support the construction of new nuclear power plants.

There has been significant public discussion about small modular reactors (SMRs) but there is currently not enough public opinion data to conclude whether these are perceived differently than traditional nuclear plants.

But there is evidence that nuclear power is seen as a low-carbon energy source with benefits. One polling firm found that 62 per cent of Canadians agree that nuclear energy can help Canada meet its climate change goals (Ipsos, 2023d).



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